1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

co-operation; and also Rai Sahib, Tashi Dadul, the Private Secretary to His Highness, Rai Sahib, Sonam Dadul, Rhennock Kazi and official Steward in charge of Palace affairs; the Honourable Mary Scott, D.D., of Gangtok, and the Very Reverend Dr. J. A. Graham, C.I.E., D.D., of Kalimpong, all of whom gave me much help and advice. My thanks are also due to Sukra Singh for his unfailing patience and good temper in situations which would have disconcerted many more sophisticated people.

I have attempted within a single volume to give an adequate description of Lepcha society and in particular of the village of Lingthem; to avoid undue length I have had to suppress a considerable amount of minor detail, but I hope that I have done this without obscuring or falsifying any facts. The religions I have in particular dealt with very summarily, for a full treatment would require a second volume comparable in size to this one, and would heavily overweight the picture I am trying to present. The volume is divided into three books, each of which represents to some extent a different method of description; in Book One I have presented the material and formalised aspects of Lepcha society, in Book Two the mainly unformalised aspects of Lepcha life, and in Book Three the history of certain individuals. I have tried to make a total picture by presenting three view-points: the frame-work of the society, the impact of the culture on the people, and the individuals who are the product of that culture and society. I have employed, to the best of my ability, the various disciplines, anthropological and psychological, functional and Freudian, which seemed apposite to the aim I had in mind; I have used them eclectically, for most of the disciplines seem to me useful and none of them completely adequate alone. My methods of working and my attitude to various aspects of anthropology are described in appropriate places in the text, particularly in Chapters Ten and Seventeen. In Chapter Seventeen I have attempted to answer some of the problems raised by my study of the Lepchas.

It has seemed to me that many sociological works appear to neglect the individuals who compose the societies they are describing; in so far as I claim any novelty in the treatment of the subject-matter of this book, it is in the fact that I have let the Lepchas speak for themselves, that I have tried not to forget that the village of Lingthem is inhabited by one hundred and seventy-six persons, and the reserve of Zongu by about two thousand. I have tried to illustrate every statement from the lives of the people of

1: Gorer J-5 (1937) 1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

CHAPTER ONE

THE LEPCHAS AND SIKKIM

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THE Lepchas[1] are a Mongoloid people living in the Himalayas on the southern and eastern slopes of Mount Kinchenjunga. It seems certain that they were originally the only inhabitants of this large tract of mountainous land, but during the last three centuries, or possibly longer, their land has been taken from them by conquering invaders, the Tibetans, the Nepali, and finally the English. At the time of the 1931 census the 25,780 registered Lepchas were almost evenly divided between the Native State of Sikkim and the Darjeeling district of British India, 13,000 being in Sikkim and the rest in Darjeeling, with the exception of 66 who were employed, chiefly as gardeners, in Calcutta.

There is no generally accepted theory among those anthropologists who believe that every tribe originally came from somewhere else as to the place of origin of the Lepchas. Various parts of Tibet and Mongolia have been suggested and a certain similarity has apparently been found between the Lepcha language and some dialect spoken in Indo-China. The Lepchas themselves have no tradition of migration and place the home of their ancestors—the people of Mayel—in one of the inaccessible valleys of Kinchenjunga.

The Lepchas do not appear ever to have resisted invasion of their own accord. Sikkim was apparently colonised by the Tibetans at some date prior to the beginning of the seventeenth century,[2]

[1] The Lepchas do not call themselves Lepchas; they call themselves *Rong*. 'Lepcha' is said to be a derogatory Nepali term—*lap-che*—meaning, though the philology is doubtful, 'nonsense talkers.' A parallel could be found in the Russian name for Germans—*nemetski*, which means 'the dumb ones.' Since all books dealing with the people and district refer to the Lepchas as Lepchas, it would seem merely pedantic and confusing to use the term *Rong*. The word would appear to have no other significance in Lepcha.

[2] I take the suggestion that Sikkim (which at that date included the present Darjeeling district) was colonised or at least dominated by the Tibetans before the beginning of the seventeenth century from *An Account of Tibet* by the

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

tea-plantations. In this district too there has been very considerable infiltration of Nepalis, coming from their crowded and relatively infertile country; more industrious and better cultivators than the Lepchas, the Nepali are continuously displacing them everywhere.

The Lepchas also appear to be a dying race; there is a difference of about 5,000 between the 1901 and the 1931 census; but the figures for Sikkim are perhaps not altogether reliable. As a society, with its unique conglomeration of attitudes, the Lepchas are certainly disappearing, for their culture presupposes a homogeneous interlocking community, and this, as well as their almost complete suppression of competition and aggression, causes an inevitable breakdown of their culture in any mixed community. This book would have been impossible if the Maharajah of Sikkim had not made the part of his estate called Zongu into a Lepcha reserve, where he has made a law that only pure-blooded Lepchas may become landowners. It is only in Zongu and in one or two small villages outside the reserve that there is a homogeneous Lepcha society, practically undisturbed by alien influence. These survivals can be considered artificial, as without the indirect pacification of the British government and the benevolence of the Maharajah, these Lepchas would, like their fellows, have been ousted from the little and poor land which remains to them. But beyond the reservation of this piece of land for their exclusive use the society has not been interfered with, nor preserved as a museum piece; it is still, as will be seen later, in a state of constant modification; indeed the economic changes of the last thirty years are likely to be particularly far-reaching.

Of the Lepchas outside Zongu I can say very little, for I only had slight opportunities of observing them. In Sikkim they appear to subsist fairly well in the mixed communities, to a very great extent adopting the habits, culture, and even the language of their neighbours; they share with them the religion of lamaism, which is the official religion of the State. In India they constitute only a tiny minority of the population of the district; they appear to have lost almost all corporate unity; they have practically completely forgotten their own language, and it would appear that none of the children round Kalimpong at any rate can speak anything except Nepali. Lost in the overwhelming mass of alien people, the Lepchas have no social organisation; and since Lepcha life is based on the social group they have been left with little except their appearance and their gentleness which can be called specifically Lepcha. All

1: Gorer J-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

my figures may be incomplete on this subject; young children have little emotional importance for Lepchas and dead ones, other than the recently dead, may easily be forgotten.

On the figures available it seems doubtful if the Lepchas of Zongu will be able to maintain their numbers in the future. Out of a total population of 176 in Lingthem, there are twenty girls (who will probably marry outside the village) and ten boys under the age of ten and eighteen boys and eleven girls between the ages of eleven and twenty. At the other end of the scale there are thirty-seven people (or a fifth of the total population) aged fifty or over, including three men and one woman of over eighty.

The Lepchas account for the presence or absence of children chiefly as a matter of luck and the results of former incarnations; there is however a myth accounting for the relatively small size of the Lepcha family as compared with the Nepali; the Lepchas they say have only seven ancestral supernaturals,[18] the Nepalis twelve. I have no complete figures for any of the other villages in Zongu but such information as I received, and such observations as I was able to make, seem to indicate a similar situation throughout the whole reserve. I think the psychological reasons given by Rivers for the breakdown in fertility among the Melanesians, supposing them to be an adequate explanation of the situation there, are inapplicable in Zongu.

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Of the forty-one married couples in Lingthem (the other nineteen married women are either co-wives or widows) fifteen were childless in the spring of 1937. Eight of these couples were young people recently married, who still had hopes of bearing children; four of them were old people living alone who had no longer any hope of children; the remaining three had adopted boys. There are also six adult men in Lingthem who were adopted as children.

The arrangements for adopting a child[19] vary according to whether the child is the son of a near relation, of an unrelated person, or an orphan. With a nearly related person the adoption is conducted with little formality; the adopting parents present the real parents with a milch-cow and a new dress for the mother: these

[18] The people of Mayel: see Chapter Nine.

[19] The adopted child is called *kup-tsop*—substitute child—and the adopting parents are called *jiut-bo* and *jiut-mu*; the adopted child addresses them as *abo* and *amu*—father and mother.

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

windy days my favourite tree would bend and sway with incredible grace: it reminded me of some frail craft riding a stormy sea.

When we first arrived the hillsides were covered with yellow daphne, the bark of which is used to make paper. There were also a number of flowering apricots, orange trees, and ferns of every description, including the huge umbrella-like tree-fern, the pith of which can be made into spirit. Rather strangely, for Sikkim is famous for its flora, we found no flowers, but the undergrowth was thick with wormwood, which saturated the air with its pleasantly bitter scent.

According to the Lepcha dictionary the word Lingtem means "a mixture of slope and level: to be out of the perpendicular, to incline, to have leaning outwards." The place is all of these, except that the amount of level ground is negligible; and it was not possible to go more than a hundred yards or so in any direction without going either steeply up or down hill. The lowest and highest houses in the village were not more than a mile apart; but to go from one to the other involved a climb of well over fifteen hundred feet.

There were altogether thirty-three houses in Lingtem, and a total population of one hundred and seventy-nine souls. These thirty-three houses were spread about over several square miles of country, and in no particular spot were more than three or four grouped together. The grouping was entirely haphazard and in no way based upon relationships: a man might be at one end of the village, his brother a mile away. There was no attempt at planning; the village had just grown up like this. Additional houses would be built on any suitable site: the proximity of relations was of less importance than the selection of a spot that was free from evil influences. The monastery was situated in roughly the centre. In addition to its ordinary function as a place of worship, it served also as a village club. Twice every month there would be religious festivals, when anything up to

2: Morris T-5 (1937)1938 AK5 Lepcha AK5

CHAPTER 3

A Strange Mixture of Fact and Fiction: being a Brief History of Sikkim

161 SIKKIM has a population of close on 110,000, of whom 25,780 are said to be Lepchas of one sort or another; but this figure does not distinguish the very large number of men who have intermarried with women of other tribes and whose offspring are accordingly no longer to be reckoned as pure Lepchas. There are no accurate figures available of the total pure Lepcha population of Sikkim, but I imagine it to be somewhere in the neighbourhood of 13,000. What can be said, however, without fear of contradiction, is that this number is steadily decreasing year by year. The reasons for this are at present not clear to me; but I believe the principal cause to be contact of the easy-going and extremely non-materialistic Lepchas with the excessively virile, more thrifty and individualistic Gurkhas. The latter, finding insufficient land in their own country, are ever seeking for fresh places in which to settle; and during the process the Lepchas have been to a great extent absorbed or at least driven further and further into the hills. The settlement of Gurkhas and others in Sikkim is now controlled; but the Lepchas have already decreased to such an extent that legislation can now do no more than retard their complete extinction, that is, as a separate tribe, for a few years longer. They claim to be the original inhabitants of Sikkim. They are of Mongoloid appearance and speak a language which belongs to the Tibeto-Burman group.

173 The early history of Sikkim is mainly based on Lepcha oral tradition, but the reigning family seems to have been from the first Tibetan. The Tibetan form of Buddhism, generally known as Lamaism, is believed to have been

8:Nebesky-Wojkowitz--1 E-5 (1950-1953) 1953 AK5 Lepcha AK5

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/269/ New Acquisitions from Sikkim and Tibet

by René Nebesky-Wojkowitz

One of the results of my three-years of ethnographic research in the Sikkim-Tibet border region, which I concluded in February, 1953, was the establishment of collections for the Ethnographic Museum /Museum für Völkerkunde/ in Vienna. The majority of the acquired objects are household implements, articles of clothing, ceremonial paraphernalia, and weapons of the Lepchas, the original inhabitants of the Himalaya kingdom of Sikkim. The Lepcha tribe, related in race and language to the Tibetans, has in the course of the last three centuries suffered a progressive narrowing of its living area as a result of the penetration of stronger neighbors. It now numbers only 30,000 members, most of whom live in Sikkim proper. A few scattered Lepcha settlements are still to be found in the vicinity of Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and the Nepalese district of Ilam, and in two valleys of Bhutan. Because of extensive adoption of the customs of Nepalese immigrants, who today form the largest population group of Sikkim, the Lepchas have sacrificed many of their native characteristics. The establishment of this first Lepcha collection therefore was very difficult, for most of the objects formerly used by the Lepchas have been replaced in more recent times by products of Nepalese, Indian, or even European origin.

The household implements included in the collection are made for the most part of bamboo; we find among them variously shaped vessels, spoons and spatulas, a churn-staff /Butterstampfer/, baskets, a grain riddle, strainers, a scale with one balance as well as wooden dishes of varying sizes, which are used for the preparation of millet beer, the alcoholic beverage preferred by the Lepchas. The tribe's art of weaving, which today is practically extinct, is demonstrated by a hand loom containing an almost completed piece of weaving; it shows—just as a second, already completed strip of weaving does

THE 'LEPCHAS' OR 'RONGS' AND THEIR SONGS

BY

L. A. WADDELL, LL.D.

114 The 'Lepchas' or 'Rongs', are the wild Mongoloid aborigenes of Sikhim, a mountainous tract, about 8000 square miles in extent, in the south-eastern Himalayas, which is wedged in between Nepal on the west, Bhotan on the east, Tibet on the north, and the plains of Bengal on the south. These people are particularly interesting, as they are amongst the least civilized of all the Himalayan tribes [1]). They have preserved intact their tribal language and many of their primitive savage customs, on account of the peculiarly isolated position of their rugged country — shut in as it is by high wall-like ridges from Nepal and Bhotan, by the everlasting snows from Tibet, and by the deadly belt of *Tarai* jungle from the Indian plains. But they are now, however, fast dying out [2]), and losing their identity by intermarriage with the swarms of more civilized Nepalese and Tibetans who have lately swept into their country, and especially so since it has been opened up under British rule; but neither their language or customs have yet been fully recorded, nor have their ethnological affinities been clearly ascertained.

Having lived amongst these people for several years in Darjiling and in their forest homes, I here attempt to rescue from oblivion some of their songs — a subject on which nothing has hitherto been published. This I do at the request of Professor A. GRÜNWEDEL, who has already in the T'oung-Pao [3]) published a small dictionary of their speech, which he compiled from some missionary tracts, and the Lepcha Grammar of the late Mr. MAINWARING [4]); and he is at present editing Mr. MAINWARING's large manuscript: Lepcha-English Dictionary. My anthropometric and ethnographic materials bearing on the racial affinities of this tribe are too bulky to be included in the present paper. Here it may be sufficient to mention that the results of my observations are in many ways

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1) Except those in the extreme east, in Assam.
2) The pure Lepchas now (1898) number only a few thousands, and their language is likely to become extinct in two or three generations.
3) In 1892. Also a short Lepcha text in 1896, 926—60, and another in Bastian's Festschrift, Berlin 1896.
4) Grammar of the Rong or Lepcha. Calcutta 1876.

[p. 41]

11:Hermanns M-5 (1951)1954
AK5 Lepcha AK5

in Tibet also, the Mongoloids are farmers. In the regions of North-West China, in Tsing-hai and Kan-su, we found that in many Chinese, living there, the Mongoloid element was completely lacking or present in a very negligible manner. These people are also of a larger build ; they have the long, high-bridged noses, the long narrow faces and in many cases the Mongolian fold is not to be found. One might object that this was due to the influence of non-Mongoloid peoples like the Tibetans and the Turks who repeatedly overran these districts and ruled over the people for long periods of time. We shall refer later to the Mongoloids in China. At this stage it can be said that in China, the pure Mongoloids came from the farming inhabitants in Eastern and Central China as we have proved in the first chapter. One cannot quote the Mongols as counter evidence, as they are a very mixed and younger culture with strong agricultural influences.

We shall not deal in a detailed manner with the customs and habits of the Lepchas at birth, betrothal, marriage, death and burial. There is only one more point which I should like to touch upon : the judging of the Lepchas through the descriptions of European authors like Gorer and C.J. Morris. The two authors describe these people as being dominated by a strong, a very strong, sex complex. J. H. Hutton remarks in his foreword to Gorer's book, "Another aspect of Lepcha life which is almost as striking as the absence of aggression, is the apparent obsession of the whole community with sex. I was tempted to suppose that the author of this book had overemphasised the Lepchas' attitude to sex through an unconscious dramatisation, a journalistic dramatisation, if I may call it so, of a want of reticence on sexual matters of all kinds in a degree quite unfamiliar in his own society. The perusal, however, of Mr. Morris's book shows that I did Mr. Gorer an injustice. At the same time I am rather inclined to feel that the apparent preoccupation of the Lepchas with sex does not necessarily imply that the importance attached to it by them in their lives is proportionately theatrical. One is inclined to wonder whether this consciousness of sex is the cause or the result of the Lepchas' declining population, a decline of which the Lepchas are acutely aware. Probably, if there is any such connection at all it is by now a vicious